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SUBJECT: NAJAF AND KUFA DISTRICTS LOCAL COUNCILS REQUESTED PRT
ASSISTANCE

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This is a PRT Reporting Cable.

¶1. SUMMARY: During a November meeting with the PRT, members of the local councils (LC) from Najaf and Kufa districts requested USG assistance to help build capacity - including the funding of an office and training of staff, particularly in the U.S. Najaf LC members, Adnan Hussein Mohammed and Jasim Mustafa Mohammed, and Kufa district LC members, Hamza Jawed Kadim and Kahtan Muhsen Ali were present in the meeting, in addition to Maki Shaker Hureeb of RTI, a USAID-sponsored NGO. The LC members lamented the lack of space to hold meetings, as well as the lack of supplies and equipment; furthermore, they noted the lack of transportation means, and the resources to invite members of other LCs to discuss matters of mutual concern. They acknowledged also that they are struggling to clarify their vaguely defined constitutional role. END SUMMARY

¶2. PRT Leader welcomed the guests to the first meeting of the PRT and the Najaf Local Council in over a year. He noted that understanding the activities of the LC was the most important goal of the meeting. Mr. Maki Shaker Hureeb from RTI noted that he had earlier worked for the Provincial Council of Najaf. He found, however, that the LC has more understanding of the concerns of the citizens than the Provincial Councils. He noted that there are three District Councils within Najaf Province and seven Sub-District Councils.

¶3. A constant theme resonating throughout the meeting was the lack of material support for the LCs. Perhaps most important was that they do not have office space in which to meet or discuss matters of importance. Moreover, the LCs have no furniture, no equipment, no transportation facilities, and have received no training. On several occasions, they pointed out that no one from the LC has been sponsored outside of Iraq for training. (NOTE: Many LC members, however, had earlier been invited to go to the U.S. for training, but declined the invitations. It is worth noting that the Najaf and Kufa LCs are now interested. END NOTE) In addition, the LC at this meeting mentioned that they would like to find funding for laptop computers and cell phones.

¶4. Members of the LC stated that the educational level must be high in order to qualify as a candidate for a position within the LC. A candidate, for example, must have a minimum of a university degree. Many members of the LCs have master's degrees and some even doctorates. LC members also pointed out that often, LC subcommittee members are experts in the subject area of the subcommittee. For example, the person who is the head of the Subcommittee on Tourism and Antiquities is a noted authority on the antiquities of Iraq. The LC members were quick to highlight that the election of the LC members was the first democratic event that took place in Iraq. The Najaf LC has 33 members while Kufa has 14. All seats on the LCs were apportioned by population. Kufa LC members also noted that Kufa

is the third largest district in Iraq after Fallujah and Baquba.

The LCs of Kufa and Najaf regularly cooperate together to tackle issues as necessary.

¶15. The Najaf LC members expressed concern for Al Alanzar, a neighborhood that has reported an inordinate number of cancer cases. Although this area has been surveyed and studied by different groups of health professionals, no one had positively identified the genesis of this high cancer rate. The LC members asked for the establishment of a modern testing lab in Najaf specifically to find the cause of this alarming number of cancer cases.

¶16. Various LC members brought up Order 71 of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) entitled "Local Governmental Powers" that specifies how PCs as well as LCs shall be constituted. The Order also defines the respective responsibilities of each. The LC members maintained that the PC is required to allocate 33% of its budget to LCs. One LC member at the meeting stated that Order 71 requires that LCs receive funding directly from the National Government and not through the Provincial Government. There is no provision in Order 71 articulating how LCs shall receive funding other than a comment in Paragraph 1 of Section 4, entitled 'Local Councils,' that says:

"Local councils are responsible for representing their constituents; ensuring that public services respond to local needs; organizing the operations of the local administration; reviewing local ministry plans; collecting and retaining local revenues, taxes and fees; identifying local budgetary requirements through the national budgeting process; and recommending appropriate action to Governorate Councils with respect to government officials, on the basis of misconduct, inefficiency or Ba'athist Party affiliation."

¶17. PC members stated that the LC office currently offers proof of residence and certificates of good character for passport applicants free of charge, because the Council of

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Representatives has not given legal approval to charge fees. One complaint voiced by the LC members was that they do not have the resources to meet with their counterparts in other areas. There is nothing in Order 71 requiring such meetings except that Paragraph 7 of Section 5, entitled "Mayors and Deputy Mayors," states: "Mayors shall meet regularly with other Mayors to ensure that services are being provided equitably and efficiently." The LC members from Najaf and Kufa were not aware of any such meetings that have taken place.

¶18. The LC committees have undertaken studies of educational and health needs in their districts, according to the LC members. They hold regular meetings with the religious "hawza" representatives.

¶19. LC members expressed their frustration at the lack of support from Baghdad, especially since they have stood by central government in every situation. The Local Councils, however, have little interaction with the central government currently, except through their own personal and informal contacts. This interaction mostly occurred when the central government debated the local governance law and other local governance issues. The members also mentioned that Najaf has 260 "muktars", respected individuals in the community who provide direct services to the residents. Kufa district has 60 muktars.

¶10. COMMENT: Interestingly, several LC members are now open to training opportunities of every kind. This may be symptomatic of an important change in attitudes in Najaf (and Karbala province.) The LCs are struggling to find their place and their role in the body politic. They claim they are closer to the people and their needs than the Provincial Councils, which are largely dominated by party (read religious party) politics. The Najaf and Kufa Local Councils are anxious to find ways to be more effective in carrying out their ill-defined and unfunded constitutional responsibilities. Heretofore, they have either

largely been ignored or have had an antagonistic relationship with the PCs which control central government allocated funds. On a more positive note, the RTI program of promoting joint training activities between the PCs and LCs is beginning to have success in facilitating the cooperation of the two bodies on various occasions.

¶11. COMMENT CONTINUED: The PRT will look for ways to work with the LCs in building capacity while making it clear that it is an Iraqi matter. It is up to the LCs themselves to work within the Iraqi body politic to clarify their constitutional role. END
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